

Message from Uma Ahluwalia, Assistant Secretary of Children's Administration
5/24/2004

Hello!

Today is a momentous day in the Children's Administration. It is the much awaited official release of our draft Kids Come First Phase II Agenda, Safe Kids in Healthy Families Plan which builds on the foundation of the first phase of Kids Come First launched in 2000. This plan responds to the federal review but also sets a course for improved child welfare practice for the next six to eight years. It is a bold and comprehensive reform plan of the child welfare system, which fundamentally shifts the way we in the Children's Administration and our contract providers serve clients. It builds on past reform and existing good practice and strengthens partnerships across the public and private continuum to impact the changes in the child welfare system to include the courts, mental health, substance abuse, education, health and our many social service providers and not just the public child welfare agency.

The fundamental components of the plan include but are not limited to:

- Keeping children safe while strengthening and preserving families
- Changing the way we respond to families
- Engaging and supporting birth, kin and resource families and communities earlier
- Making services and supports available earlier
- Improving safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for all children including adolescents and children of color
- Encouraging research based practice modalities that focus on outcomes for all services delivered by public and private agencies
- Improving strong public-private partnerships
- Emphasizing and achieving consistency of practice across the state
- Emphasizing data driven decision-making
- Re-aligning headquarters functions to better support reform implementation in the field
- Recognizing that such an overwhelming reform of the system will require additional resources and legislative changes and strategically mapping these out
- It is a plan that returns financial savings in the long run achieved through practice improvements to offset up front investments while increasing federal funding capacity.

This plan reflects the work of the best minds and the best critical thinking from our staff and our partners. It captures many recommendations from the PIP workgroups but not all because of the need for prioritization and identifying high impact strategies. It also doesn't capture recommendations that are already in policy, or in development and implementation stages.

The Children's Administration cannot do this work alone in the coming months and years and we need you in a multitude of capacities to help us achieve our improvements. We recognize the many opportunities and threats that are before us at this moment in time. Our commitment to improved outcomes for children and families, the outcomes of our federal review, the credibility of our administration and staff, the increased tort risk and a general acknowledgment that a proactive and bold new vision needs to be crafted, have all influenced the development of the Draft Kids Come First Phase II comprehensive plan. I urge you to join me and all our internal and external partners in supporting this plan and resourcing it fully to ensure its success. We have a few months ahead of us in negotiating this plan with the federal government with a possible September 1, 2004 implementation. Please help us refine it and make it the best that together our system can strive for.

With warm regards,
Uma Ahluwalia
Assistant Secretary
Children's Administration, DSHS